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# FIRST PERSON

## Surgery Restores Woman's Dignity

**Health worker trained on obstetric fistula stops a young girl's suffering**



Photo: USAID/Ethiopia/Judith McCord

Tigist Dadena (left) was discovered in ostracism by community-based reproductive health agent Tejitu Leta (right), who fundraised for her fistula treatment in Addis Ababa.

***"I was saved by the community-based health agent who referred me to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital," said Tigist Dadena, who lived alone with an obstetric fistula for four months.***

During her first pregnancy at age 17, Tigist Dadena was in prolonged labor for three days before her mother, the village's traditional birth attendant, decided she needed to be transported to a hospital.

Tigist delivered a stillborn at the hospital and returned home a week later. She was exhausted, weak and in terrible discomfort. Tigist had an obstetric fistula, a hole between her birth passage and her internal organs resulting from prolonged labor and the pressure from the unborn baby's head on the inside part of the mother's pelvis. In Ethiopia, close to 9,000 women experience obstetric fistulas every year.

Afraid to say anything to the doctors and nurses, Tigist returned home without treatment or hope for healing. Because of the constant leaking of urine and feces that resulted from the fistula, she was placed by her family in a separate hut where neighbors never visited. Unable to sit or stand comfortably, she spent her days bent over a chair. Sadly, women with obstetric fistula often face social consequences such as ostracism and even divorce.

Four months later, Tejitu Leta, a community-based health agent working for a local USAID-funded non-governmental organization, discovered Tigist while visiting the village on a polio vaccination campaign. Having learned about fistulas during her training, Tejitu knew Tigist required immediate care. After seeking approval from Tigist's family, Tejitu raised money within the community for Tigist to be transported to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, nearly three hours away.

After corrective surgery and one month of care, Tigist returned to her family and village, and felt hope again for the future.